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JOHN OUTERBRIDGE

A RETROSPECTIVE

THURSDAY, AUGUST 26, 1993 • 6:30 P.M.

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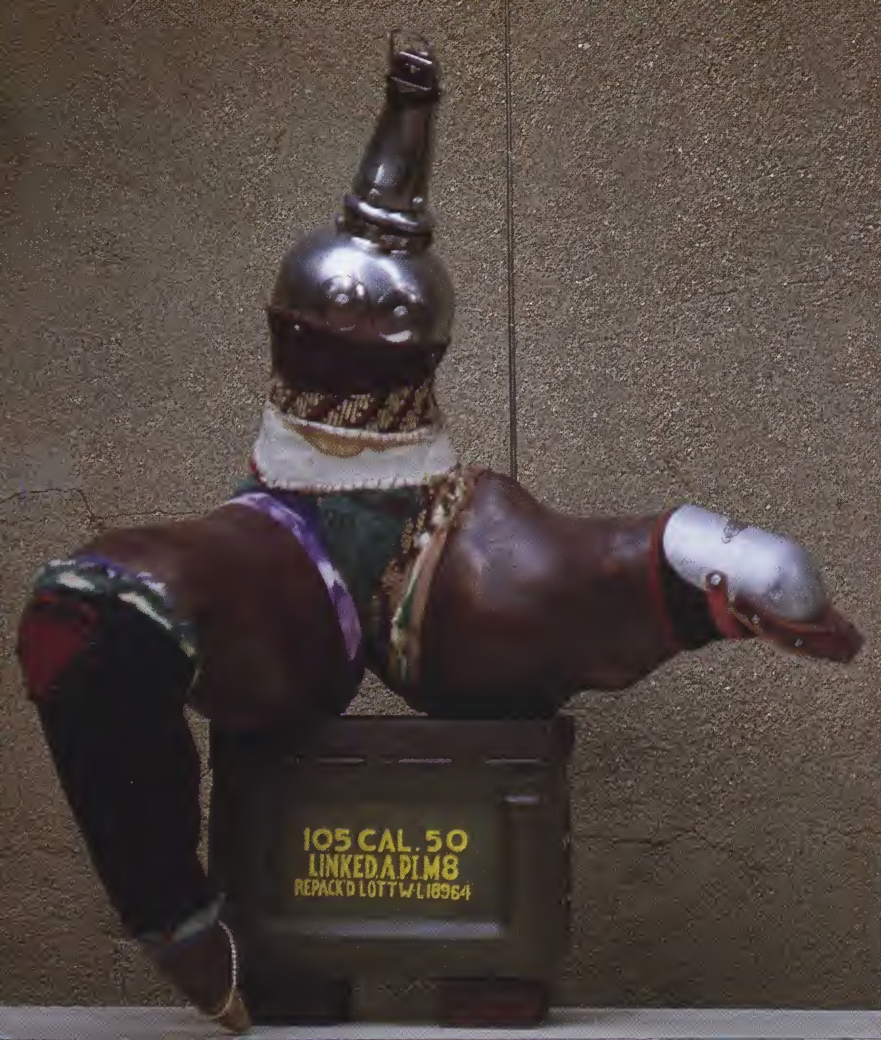
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AT&T NEW ART/NEW VISIONS.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WAS PROVIDED BY THE CITY OF
LOS ANGELES CULTURAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT.





CASTILLO OUTER BRIDGE



JOHN OUTERBRIDGE
SCULPTOR OF OPPOSITIONS

March 12 - April 2, 1992

Opening Reception: March 11

6:30 - 8:00 PM

**Rancho Santiago College Art Gallery
Santa Ana, California**



JOHN OUTERBRIDGE

A RETROSPECTIVE

AUGUST 28, 1993 - MAY 1, 1994

CALIFORNIA AFRO-AMERICAN MUSEUM



"First Poet, Olivia"
1993

This exhibition was made possible by AT&T NEW ART/NEW VISIONS

Additional support was provided by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department

BRIDGE EFFECTIVE

familiar with the work of John (3) to the politically active artistic 1960s and early work, however, in context. His materials and important because how an academic artist can effectively and sustain the elements of form in his work. He has successfully transformed form is not mutually exclusive. His rejection of academic disciplines of knowledge intersect, giving importance of content.

commentary on what enter in and processes inform what makes us on one's position is divided and in each you things which have John Outterbridge's recognizable African-American narratives that histories and and future surmount hold on to what undeniable and human all cultures is continuity and expression. The subtextual relationships explored investigations of his

played a major role and receives the personal spirituality artistic decisions. Family and spiritual choices that materials, the way in which information, which he creates which he has found

Outterbridge was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, the eldest son in a family of eight children (three girls, five boys). His father, John Ivery, was self-employed, using a refurbished truck and a great deal of ambition and ingenuity to support his family. He hauled "people and things," bartering, salvaging, filling the needs of his community. His mother, Olivia, is remembered as quiet, smelling of starch, reading and writing poetry, and playing the piano. She was his "first art teacher," encouraging his artistic development by providing materials, a nurturing environment, and by setting a creative example.

Their influence on the artist can be seen in two of his most recent works. *First Poet, Olivia* (1993) is the signature piece in this retrospective. It is in the shape of an ironing board with seven irons that rest on their ends. The irons are carved from wood and painted to simulate real "hot irons." Outterbridge made the irons because he prefers to work with found materials and refashion them into forms. This piece also refers to Outterbridge's father through the goat shaped ironing board. It recalls the "billy goat" that his father brought home as a gift through a successful barter for materials. *John Ivery's Truck: Hauling Away Traps and Keeping Yams* (1993) represents his father's strength and ingenuity. Ivery grew up during the height of the industrialization of North America. During World War II he and a group of friends created a bus and truck transportation network from Greensboro to the Marine base at Cheery Point, North Carolina, to transport people to and from defense jobs. When he wasn't transporting people to work in the summer, he would transport groups of children to the beach with "great tubs of lemonade" because Black people couldn't swim in the local swimming pools at that time. Outterbridge states "but they had the Atlantic Ocean!" In the cab of *John Ivery's Truck* is the "essence of members, things that we know are ours, that grace our dignity and language as people."



Outterbridge's academic art training began in high school where he was introduced to aspects of art history through craft fairs in North Carolina. The skills of shoemakers and bucket makers were made important. In 1952 he studied engineering at Carolina A & T, in Greensboro. That profession showed the most promise for future employment for a young Black man. His education was temporarily suspended when he entered

because of the leg promise of forty acres after emancipation. He also uses the loaves to represent one of his live by, that of taking time. Since there are in a week, the number reoccurring theme. *Soap Conference Scarecrows* (1993) is an issue of effacing. It represents a field of

the United States Army in early 1953. While stationed in Europe he became exposed to art museums. In his free time he and a fellow soldier painted in the streets of France and Germany. His paintings were well received by his captain who made a studio, flex time and transportation available to him. Outterbridge was assigned to do paintings in clubs, offices, and in schools for American children.

It was during this time that Outterbridge decided that he wanted to study art. He adopted Impressionism as a guide post in his art because, as he says, "of the break away attitude of the artists." Their rejection of classical realism and process of paint application fascinated him. His attraction to their work was to be strengthened later by his study of West African philosophies relating to abstraction. After his discharge from the Army in 1955, he came back to the United States and enrolled in the American Academy of Art in Chicago where he studied commercial art and illustration with Vernon Stakely. Active in the arts community of Chicago, Outterbridge and fellow artists John Pinkney, Elliot Hunter and Jose Williams opened a gallery on the South Side.

In 1963 he emigrated to Los Angeles where he began to create assemblage simply because the cost of paint and brushes was prohibitive and discarded materials were readily available. He was strongly influenced by artist Noah Purifoy and his combining of paint with objects and materials. He was also influenced by sculptor Mel Edwards because as Outterbridge saw it, "his life style and thinking equaled his gesture of who he was." Just as in Chicago, he became involved with artist co-ops and coalitions with such artists as Van Slater, Bill Williams, Don Conchalar, Elizabeth Catlett, Charles White, Marie Johnson-Calloway and others.

In the 1960s, a major assemblage movement occurred in California that focused on found objects. Outterbridge's work, however, took

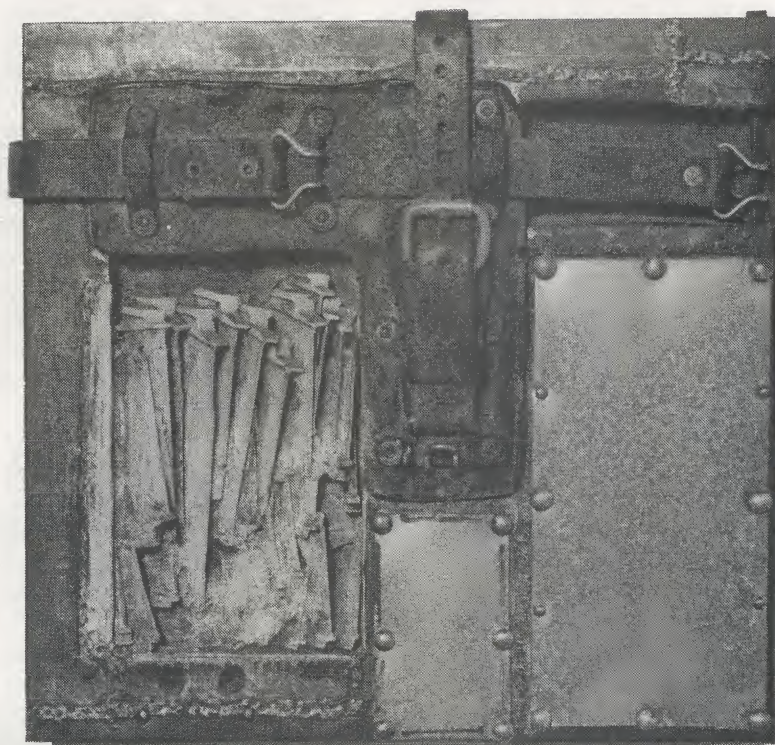
a slightly different turn, preferring that "the work engage part of the experience of the re-invention of things" and on "how you hold things together and how things go together." Towards that end, he cut tin cans open and used the metal to create new pieces of work rather than inserting the cans into his work.

Outterbridge became more aware of assemblage when he began teaching workshops in the Pasadena Art Museum's original facility on Los Robles Street in 1967 and more so as a preparator/installer in the new facility from 1967-1973. There he became aware of the work of Robert Rauschenberg, Mark Di Suvero, Larry Bell, Andy Warhol, Donald Judd and Claes Oldenburg. He remembers an exhibition in 1967 which was an examination of East and West coasts American Expressionism. Andy Warhol was in the show. Outterbridge installed Warhol's *Campbell Soup Cans* (the same type of cans that he was dismantling and recycling the tin). Both he and Warhol were working toward a redefinition of commonly held beliefs and expectations for a popularized object and the material in which it was made.

Of the artists encountered during this period, Mark Di Suvero had the most impact on Outterbridge's work. Di Suvero used high cranes to move the large beams which were a part of his work. The crane expanded the concept of artist's tool for Outterbridge. It connected artist with industrial materials and process, something that linked Di Suvero's process to that of Outterbridge's father. Outterbridge enjoyed thinking in large scale and when Di Suvero travelled, he would leave his tools with Outterbridge to use. The *Containment* series grew out of this relationship.

In this series (1967-1969), Outterbridge explores the concept of boundaries and how to break past them. He wanted to open up areas that were presented as enclosed. He questioned the contained pictorial space in paintings bound by stretcher bars and frames. Physical and mental enclosures were examined. In examining the context of containers he began to cut into cans and flatten them out to reuse the tin or aluminum. Some of the earliest pieces in this series were formed in this way.

"Let Us Tie Down Loose Ends"
Containment Series, 1968



"In Search Of
The Missin' Mule"
1993

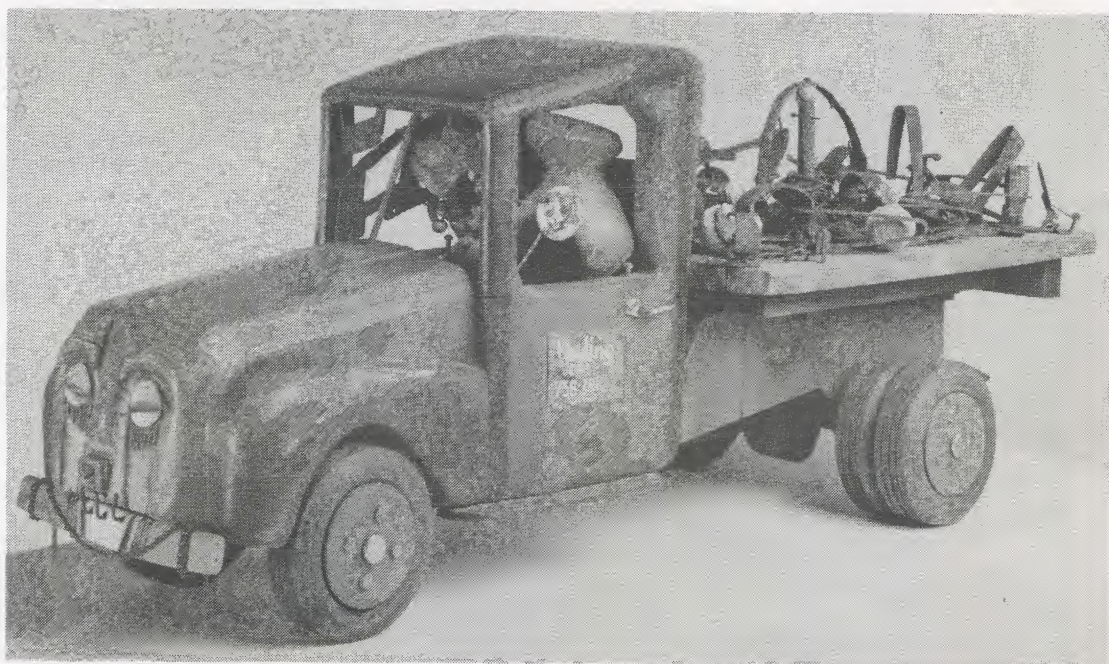


metaphor for all of the tales that one cannot forget. Within the piece is a "fetish field" with a conjurer who possesses the powers of hoodoo/voodoo. The scarecrows are included to frighten away things which are not needed, things that can cause harm, physically and mentally.

Another work, *The Still Steel Drum Song* (1993) makes the transition from ancestral works into the *Aesthetics of Urban Blight* series. In this work he is investigating the heavy and bulky feeling of steel drum shapes. He is also playing with phonics and meaning. The work refers to the stillness in language. The drums are awash in Mississippi red clay, a metaphor for the footprint of the missing mule because as Outterbridge states, "the land [40 acres] is nowhere in focus." He is constantly looking back into his history. His

He describes his art as an "art of feeling, or being." He further states that "I hate to think that I have not grown past Robert Duncanson (a 19th century landscape painter). . . hate to think that I haven't grown past the gestures of the Harlem Renaissance." He continues to rely equally on academic training and intuitive knowledge in these works. Because of his understanding of process and materials, histories and spirituality, he feels free to return to and be renewed by subjects which he has explored in the past. His veneration of ancestors will help to guide him as he continues to contemplate and conceptualize the urban landscape.

Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins
Exhibition Curator



cause of the legendary failed
promise of forty acres and a mule
er emancipation. Outterbridge
o uses the lost mule to
resent one of his principles to
e by, that of taking one day at a
e. Since there are seven days
a week, the number seven is a
ccurring theme. *Lie Lye*
ap Conference with Seven
scarecrows (1993) addresses the
ue of effacing. The work
resents a field of memories, a

work is undoubtedly influenced by
themes that refer very specifically
to his African and African-
American heritage, his
familial and community experi-
ences. New ancestral works
created in 1993 such as *First Poet*,
Olivia and *John Ivery's Truck:*
Hauling Away Traps and Keeping
Yams, Missin' Mule, and *Lie Lye*
Soap Conference with Seven
Scarecrows, demonstrate this influ-
ence.

"John Ivery's Truck,
Hauling Away
Traps and
Keeping Yams"
1993

The California Afro-American
Museum is a State of California
Museum. Pete Wilson, Governor

John Outterbridge

October 23 – December 21, 2012

OPENING RECEPTION

October 23 from 6-8pm



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